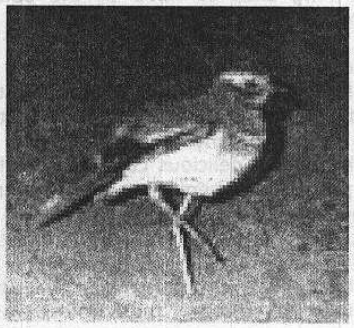
Akshardham. At Okhla we saw Red wattled lapwing, Tailorbird, Pied mynas, Rufous backed shrike, Pied bush chat, Red munias, Yellow bellied prinia, Ashy prinia, Plain prinia, Little brown dove, Common stonechat, Blackwinged stilts, Silverbills, River terns, Wire-tailed swallows, Black tailed godwits, Black and Brownheaded gulls, Avocets, Large cormorants, Black necked grebe, Green bee-eaters, Red-vented bulbuls, Flamingos and phew!!! a mass of Greylag geese. Later we went to Janpath for shopping and lunch.

Thursday 29th Dec: Back in Hyderabad after 5 days of birding and lots of fun. All good camps must come to an end. But, there is always the next BSAP camp to look forward to!

Jerdon's Courser Habitat Under Threat

By P. Jeganathan

In the November 2005 (Vol.2, No.11) issue of Pitta our editors asked why our members are hesitant to submit articles. After reading that, I was thinking about writing some interesting observations of the birds of Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary (SLWLS), Cuddapah District. But, now I would like to brief the members about the recent catastrophe that has taken place in and around the SLWLS.



The Jerdon's Courser (*Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*) doesn't need any introduction, especially for our members. We consider this beautiful bird as the "Pride of Andhra Pradesh". It was rediscovered in 1986 and till 2000 its known distribution was a single site a few hundred metres in diameter in scrub jungle near Reddipalli in the Sagileru River valley. Recent research conducted by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) along with Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Universities of Reading and Cambridge, funded by Darwin Initiative, UK has located their presence in three new sites in and around SLWLS. All these are all within 14 km of the original rediscovery site.

We received permission from the A.P. Forest Department to carry out radio-telemetry studies recently. I was in SLWLS in October 2005 to accomplish this task. But what we found near the sanctuary was very disturbing. The Telugu-Ganga Canal was being constructed around the eastern part of SLWLS. Timely warning given by BNHS and prompt action taken by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department (APFD) resulted in stopping this canal work for the time being.

Most of you might aware be that at the time of the rediscovery of the Jerdon's Courser, this site was under threat by this canal construction. Officials from the APFD and State Government of Andhra Pradesh recognized the ornithological importance of the site and declared it as the Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary and caused the proposed course of the canal to be adjusted to avoid the Sanctuary. It should be noted that the late Sri. Pushp Kumar who was the Additional Chief Conservator in Charge of Wildlife during that period had played a pivotal role in conserving this bird and its habitat. In fact he had visited the rediscovery site along with Dr. Salim Ali. I did not know him personally but I met him briefly when we had conducted the workshop on the Jerdon's Courser in Hyderabad in January 2003. He was also a member of National Wildlife Action Plan 2002-2016.

This action plan suggests that suitable alternative homes should be identified for single isolated populations of species such as the Jerdon's Courser and to manage those sites as Protected Areas effectively. While we are grieving on the sad demise of Sri Pushp Kumar we need to grieve for the Jerdon's Courser and its habitat as well. Because nearly 22 ha of suitable habitat of the Jerdon's Courser was destroyed due to the canal construction including one of the sites where the Jerdon's Courser was reported in 2001. Apart from this the proposed canal route goes very close to the rediscovery site of the Jerdon's Courser. This is the only place in the world at the moment where these birds are known to be present at almost all the time. It is estimated that if the proposed canal progresses any further it will destroy c.50 ha of suitable habitat of the Jerdon's Courser around the Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary.

A more detailed report on the impact of the Telugu-Ganga Canal on the Jerdon's Courser habitat can be downloaded from the BNHS website www.bnhs.org.

It is quite obvious that the Jerdon's Courser needs a lot more support than it is getting at the moment. I urge all our members to write to the State and Central Governments about this issue and make a strong case for protection of the habitat of this unique bird. Some of our members have already voiced their concerns over this issue, and we need many more like them. Apart from that please ask your naturalist friends and likeminded organizations to do so too. In case these organizations are not aware of the canal issue they can visit the BNHS website to get more details. We need to protect our pride for ever.